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# The Story of *Dhon Cholecha*: A Structural Analysis

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## Abstract

Folktales are part of folk literature, which is more widely referred to as folklore. Every community has its own folklore and it has been widely practiced since the time immemorial. It is the oral art of the common people representing the contributions of many anonymous creators. Folktales are regarded as the simplest form of narratives these tales have their own structures. Tales of these types from various cultures have also been analyzed in terms of their structures. In the present study Vladimir Propp can be considered for the structural analysis of a Nepali tale. After the publication of his book *Morphology of the folktale* the folklorists got a new approach to reveal the tales from its structures. So, this research article tries to explore the structures of a Nepali folktale using a tale to explore its own structures. To make a whole it advocates an investigation of the relationship between forms and suggests a structural analysis. In this context a tale from *Tales of Kathmandu* "The story of *Dhon Cholecha*" has been analyzed to meet the aforementioned objective. Since this tale has its narrative structure where we find two different moves and can be diagnosed as the first move and the second move and they run in a quite contrastive way, so from this type of contradiction the tale can be analyzed in terms of contrastive structure analysis from the narrative of "Dhon Cholecha" which contributes for the 'social purpose' of story telling as well.

**Keywords:** Folktale, folklore, structure, contrastive structure, form, function, didactic

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## Introduction

Folktale is a story passed down orally from generation to generation. It is more widely referred to as folklore. Many folklorists have labelled myths, legends and folktales as major narrative genres in folktales. Simply, a folktale is a traditional story that has been passed on by word of mouth. Chudamani Bandhu in *Aspects of Nepalese folklore* says, "Folktales are handed down in the speech communities from generations. However the lovers of folktales used to copy and translate them from the written sources" (165). In Nepali context folktale has been taken differently. To make it more precise scholar Bandhu further writes, "Folktales are known as Dantya Katha (Literally, dental story) in Nepali owing to its oral origin. It is also called sunne Katha (Hearable story) as against janne katha (Solvable story/riddle). Folklorists use the term loka katha 'folktale' for such stories" (165). Defining folktales Janak Lal Sharma in his book; *Our Society: A Glimpse* writes "Folktales (Loka Katha) are the events/plots which are told from generation to generation in the human society" (175).

Simply, folktale is a traditional story that has been passed on by word of mouth. Folktales of a culture are usually preserved as a part of a long folk tradition reflecting the humor, romance and

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wisdom of the people in the culture. There have been many areas where folktales have been interpreted. The present study aims to inquire a folktale from the structural point of view. Many scholars have done their research on the very topic but have not carried their research in the field of Nepali folk literature for a structural analysis.

Peter Harle in his article "Structuralism" in *Folklore Forum* writes on the possibility of structural analysis. He puts:

If folklorists ground their studies in careful fieldwork and listen to the interpretations offered by the people whose folklore is being studied, they may be able to make fruitful use of structural analysis with less risk of imposing their own imagined order where it doesn't belong. (14)

Structural analysis has been practiced differently in different cultural context. In this regard Allan Dundes also drew an influential distinction between the approach of Propp and Levi-Strauss. According to Dundes, "Propp focusses on the syntagmatic aspects of structure, while Levi-Strauss is concerned with paradigmatic structuralism" (xi-xii).

In this context the structural analysis of the tales can be claimed to begin with Propp's *Morphology of the folktales* (1958, 1968) which is ground breaking morphological classification of Russian Folktales. According to Propp, "a tale can be described according to its component parts and the relationship of these components to each other and to the whole" (19) Propp further says that an event as an act of a character defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action can be extracted as basic components of the tale. He then identifies thirty one functional events, or "what a tale's dramatis personae" do in his study of 115 Russian fairy tales.

After Vladimir Propp many other scholars like: Alan Dundes & Bremond study the structures of folktales from the various cultures. Folklorists have given the growing interest in narrative as a social and psychological phenomenon, rather than solely as a formal literary or historical genre.

E. K. Taylor in his *Using Folktales* writes on the importance of folktales as:

In the case of folktales, it can be generally accepted that the function or the social purpose of story telling is to preserve the culture of a civilization, to explain natural phenomena to transmit historical and important social information, or to teach important moral and ethical issues. (20)

In pursuing a structural study on a particular folktale of Nepal the present research attempts to reveal the structural pattern of "The Story of Dhon Cholecha" to analyze from reward/punishment model in the narrative structure.

The present study tries to reveal the structural feature of a story. Among the many different structural patterns of tales identified in the field which will focus on the most common and striking one - the reward/punishment model. As an analysis through the structural method, the methodology used here is basically structural one and will be analyzed through contrastive structure model. The aim is to reveal how Nepali folktales can be the best ground for the structural analysis from contrastive model which can be a new approach in the field. To carry out the research it follows the methodology of the textual analysis, library research, and structural theories to meet the objective. And for other proper analysis the study has decided to pick a

folktale from *Tales of Kathmandu: Folktales from the Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal* named “The Story of “Dhon Cholecha.”

The tale titled “Dhon Cholecha” from *Tales of Kathmandu* will be analyzed to reveal the contrastive narrative structure. This tale is one of the few Nepalese folktales “with rigid structure” (84). Here we deal with the step mother as a wicked and jealous character and on the other hand the step daughter as an innocent character.

The research takes time to analyze two different characters and how they fit in the contrastive structure. Thus this endeavor will reveal how a Nepali folktale bears the contrastive content and how it helps for the functioning of a tale in bringing the effect on the readers. Hope this revelation of contrastive model will help to make a different reading of the text.

## Textual Analysis

“The Study of Dhon Cholecha” is a folk tale taken from *Tales of Kathmandu: Folktales from the Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal* by Karma Sakya and Linda Griffith. They write “It is one of the few Nepalese folktales with a rigid structure” (84). This is one of the many folktales which present the step mother as a wicked and jealous person. On the other hand, the step daughter is presented as sweet and innocent. For an analysis of narrative structure in the story “Dhon Cholecha” is appropriate at the very moment, to talk from structural point of view. Vladimir Propp did the structural approach of folktales of Russia. He found out that there are thirty one functions of the dramatis personae in the Russian folktales; he calls these dramatis personae. These according to him appear in a rigid order, such that if in a tale, one doesn't appear where it is supposed to appear, it will never appear again in the tale. This type of analysis drew attention to another folklorist Alan Dundes who identifies himself with the definition of Propp. He (Dundes) says “structuralism is the study of the interrelationship or organization of the component parts of an item of folklore” (67). This method of analysis is not limited to narrative genre but also application to minor genres like proverbs, riddles, superstitions etc. To be precise, the present study picks a Nepali folktale in which the researcher aims to adapt Propp's concept of the events and distribution of the narrative roles to the characters in a tale. In the tale “The story of Dhon Cholecha” (1980), there are two protagonists, one of whom behaves according to certain specific rules, and rewarded. The other protagonist breaks the rules and deserves the punishment. To go thorough the narrative the study needs to distribute the roles of the protagonists. In the narrative Maincha's role is protagonist A. She has already lost her mother. She has got a wicked jealous step mother who creates problems at Maincha all the time. Maincha has her half-sister who is from the wicked jealous step mother. This half-sister's role is protagonist B. Maincha has to graze the family's nanny -goat, named Dhon Cholecha. She is completely attached with it. This nanny-goat has a role as Guide. There are lakhes in the tale and their role can be distributed as Donor.

With the development of the story of “Dhon Cholecha” we can find the two different 'moves: the first move and the second move. Protagonist A is the main character in the first part of the story, and protagonist B in the second part. They are comparable and stand in contrast to each other. The role of donor is also distributed among several characters who sets test for the protagonists. The narrative structure in this type of tales can be said to be made up as R. Drory puts “two symmetrically opposed moves which are formally identical” (32). The structure of sequence of

events can be of: Task/test → Success → Reward; Task → Failure → punishment. Such story structure can be understood as the contrastive narrative structure as well.

A tale may be made up of more than one elementary sequence of events. In order to explain the linkage between the events, the notions of move by Propp have to be considered. Move is a label introduced by Propp for a series of events. From the analysis above the unit of analysis in terms of events and moves and the elementary sequence of events or the basic structure of "The Story of Dhon Cholecha" from the book *Tales of Kathmandu: Folktales from the Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal* by Karna Shakya and Linda Griffith can be outlined as follows:

Table 1

Once upon a time there lived a little girl named Maincha whose mother had died when she was very young. Her father remarried and his wife gave birth to a daughter. Maincha's step-mother was a wicked, jealous woman. She never gave the elder girl good food, but she prepared the best possible food for her own daughter. The elder daughter had to attend to all the household duties. She also had to graze the family's nanny-goat, Dhon Cholecha, to whom she was very attached. In spite of all the heavy work and poor food, Maincha was always healthy and happy. Her stepmother became curious as to why Maincha was healthier than her own daughter, whom she fed and pampered so well.

When Maincha finished her daily routine of household jobs, she would take Dhon Cholecha to the jungle for grazing. One day the step-mother told her daughter to follow her half-sister and find out what she did in the grazing land. Maincha used to be very careful with Dhon Cholecha, never letting her out of her sight. The nanny-goat also loved Maincha very much and as soon as they reached a secluded spot, the goat would spit out a good hot meal which she had saved for Maincha. On this day, Maincha was as usual enjoying the hot meal given by the goat when her suspicious half-sister saw her and asked her what she was eating. Maincha asked her half-sister not to tell their mother, and gave her some of her own meal. When they came home,, the jealous half-sister told her mother the whole story of how Dhon Cholecha fed Maincha with delicious food every day. This was, of course, why she was so healthy. The step-mother made a plan to kill the nanny-goat so that Maincha would no longer get any good food. Learning that her beloved goat was to be killed, Maincha cried bitterly. Dhon Cholecha couldn't tolerate her friend's grief and bleated in her ear, "Whatever has to happen will happen. Don't worry. Bury my bones in the garden, and there will spring up a big tree which will yield you lots of 'yomari', (a sweet rice-dumpling). (This "yomari" bearing tree may be a kind of fig tree whose fruits are very similar in shape to "yomari").

### Move- 1

Protagonist A is introduced (Maincha)

Guide leads

Protagonist A to

Donor ( Dhon Cholecha) to Laakhe (Demons)

The step-mother killed the goat and prepared a feast, but Maincha spent all the time crying in her room. Her step-mother kept asking her to come and partake of the feast, but she refused constantly, complaining that she had a headache, stomach ache and so on. When the feast was over, Maincha collected every single bone and buried them in the garden. As Dhon Cholecha had predicted, a big tree grew which produced “yomari” sweets.

One day, while Maincha was perched on the top branch enjoying the fruit of the tree, a couple of “lakhe” (demons) passed by and asked her to throw them down some sweets. Kind hearted Maincha did so, but they landed on the ground. The “lakhe” refused to pick up the “yomari” from the ground and asked her to come down from the tree and hand the sweets to them. When she did so, the couple tricked her into going with them, arrived at the “lakhe’s” house. They asked her to prepare “chata-mari” (a very thin round papery bread made of rice) while they bathed in the river. When the innocent Maincha was cooking, a mouse appeared and said, “If you give me a piece of bread, I’ll give you a piece of advice.”

Generous Maincha threw it some bread, but again the mouse repeated the same request. Without any annoyance, she threw it some more bread. The third time Maincha threw it some bread the mouse finally gave her some important advice. It said, “Don’t stay long in this house. The people who brought you here are demons. At this very moment they are sharpening their knives to kill you. Before they come, gather up all their treasures of precious stones, gold and silver, and run back home.” The mouse further advised her to spit on each step of the staircase, as well as putting charcoal on each one. (The exact significance of putting charcoal on each step is not clear, but the process is most dramatic and strongly affected the teller when he heard the story at an early age.)

The demons returned anticipating the delicious meal of a young and tender child. They knocked at the door and called out, “Maincha, Maincha!” but every time the spittle on each step called out, “Wait a minute, wait a minute!”. When the door still wasn’t opened, the impatient demons broke it down and were furious to discover both the girl and their fortune gone.

Maincha arrived home and knocked at the door, but nobody, neither her father, step-mother nor step-sister, was ready to open the door for her. When she called out, “Come and help me! I have been carrying this heavy fortune a long distance!” the step-mother eagerly opened the door. Every member of the family was surprised to see more wealth and treasure than they had ever seen before. The step-mother was immediately very curious how Maincha had obtained such a

Protagonist A meets Donor

Donor sets Protagonist A first task/test.

Protagonist A performs successfully.

Protagonist A is tested by Donor second time, third time .....

Protagonist A performs successfully.

Protagonist A is rewarded.

fortune. When Maincha narrated the whole story from beginning to end, the greedy step-mother decided to send her own daughter to wait for the demons at the tree.

As expected, the same "lakhe" couple came by and asked for "yomari sweets. As she was instructed, the girl let herself be carried away by them. She was also asked to prepare food while the "lakhe" went off to bathe. As she had planned, when the mouse came and asked for bread in return for advice, she gave it a piece of bread. When the mouse again asked a second time, she threw it some crumbs, but when the mouse asked a third time, the girl lost her temper and beat it to death with a red hot poker.

Eventually the "lakhe" returned home, and after dining, they all retired to bed. The girl slept between the two demons, who had yet to feast on their true dinner. In the middle of the night the male demon took out his sharp knife and cut a big piece of flesh from the young girl. She cried out in pain and the female demon exclaimed, "How naughty he is, pinching you like that! Come over to my side." But she in turn cut another big piece of flesh from the young girl. Finally the demons ate all the girl's flesh, picked up the bones and brought them back to the "yomari" tree.

The next morning the step-mother was eagerly expecting her daughter to come home with a vast fortune, and was happily combing her hair on the balcony. A big crow perched nearby and cawed, "The mother is combing her hair while her daughter is nothing but bones." As she heard this her heart stopped. When she looked out she saw the bones of her daughter beneath the "yomari" tree. Beating her chest she cried bitterly for a long time. Nobody came to console her, not even her husband, who had by now taken Maincha's side. The cruel step-mother no longer had any power, and lived in the house like a maid until her death.

Thus the reward and punishment model is well structured in the story 'Dhon Cholecha.' This is also known as contrastive narrative structure for its two different moves with the help of two different characters- Protagonist A and Protagonist B.

## Conclusion

The present research study pays attention for the analysis and discussion on the narrative form (structure) of a folktale available in Kathmandu. The investigation it was to reveal whether the Nepali folktales fit in the structural analysis. While doing so textual analysis with the help of the structural functions identified by Vladimir Propp found fit in the Nepali folktales. Carrying analysis in the tale "The story of Dhon Cholecha" Propp's concepts, the events and distribution of narrative roles to the characters of the tale fits well. There are two protagonists, where one

### Move- 2

Protagonist B is introduced (step-daughter).

Protagonist B learns about Donor.

Protagonist B is led to Donor by Guide.

Protagonist B meets Donor.

Donor sets protagonist B the first task/test.

Protagonist B fails.

Donor sets test second time, third time ... to protagonist B.

Protagonist B fails to perform.

Protagonist B is punished.

follows rules and behaves well is rewarded; the other breaks the rules is punished. The narrative structure in this type of tales can be said to be made up of as Drory says "two symmetrically opposed moves which are formally identical '(32). The structure of the sequence of events also fits as: Task → success → Reward; Task → Failure → Punishment. So, such structures can be revealed in other Nepali folktales as well. Thus the present research can help to reveal other approaches in studying the folktales of Nepal. Revealing such structures of the text may not be enough. Folktale has been the traditional tool that Nepali societies employ to entertain, educate as well as transmit their traditions, cultures and values to their succeeding generation. In this regard the present research can help to carryout a new study like didactic moral from a different culture because the reward/punishment narrative structure is to give moral lessons where good is rewarded and evil is punished for a disciplined and a just society.

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